



PAWNEE PRAIRIE PARK

Frequently Asked Questions

Pawnee Prairie Park improvements will soon be underway. These include repair to the existing concrete path and the addition of sustainable material paths for bicycling that will connect to the Air Capital Memorial Park and eventually to the Prairie Sunset Trail. This issue grew out of increasing requests from area residents to utilize Pawnee Prairie Park as there are no other significant park amenities available to them. The improvements, an attempt to balance the needs of area residents with equestrian users, are designed to have minimal impact on horseback riders, wildlife, and the natural footprint of the park. There has been much discussion at the Board of Park Commissioners meetings and other public input over the past several months that has provided guidance and subsequent revisions. Our goal has been to create a space to attract more visitors and to allow the families of Wichita to enjoy a natural setting while riding, hiking, or bicycling in southwest Wichita. We hope that this document and the final plan will help answer many of the questions that have been asked during our public engagement.

Question 1: Were there any “use restrictions” for the land that the City purchased for implementing this park for southwest Wichita?

Answer: No. In 1969, the land acquired for a new park was officially named Pawnee Prairie Park; more land for this park was acquired up through 1976, totaling 624.49 acres. None of the land acquisition documents on record included “use restrictions.”

Question 2: Was any of the land that is now Pawnee Prairie Park donated?

Answer: A heavily forested portion of the park (11.26 acres) that juts into The Park HOA neighborhood was donated in 1967 by Park Investments LLC without restrictions. All other park land was purchased by the City of Wichita.

Question 3: Wasn't this property purchased so there could be an equestrian park?

Answer: No, the land was originally purchased for a multi-purpose park that could have included ballfields, lakes, playgrounds, etc. However, due to the west side of town having no public golf course at the time, a large portion of the land was set aside for this use and is now Tex Consolver Golf Course (built in 1972). The golf course is accessed from Tyler Road and is a total of 204 acres. In 1973, the City Council adopted a proposal to allow equestrian, hiking, and nature trails for the protection of wildlife in the remaining property. New home developments began being built to the west of the park in the mid-1990s, and new home developments to the west of this park continue to be built as far west as 135th St South.

Question 4: Won't installing paths for bicycles endanger the wildlife in this park?

Answer: A review of the Wichita Wild Habitat area, Chisholm Creek Park located in northeast Wichita shows that there have been no reported incidents that bicycles have disturbed any nature or habitat in this park. Chisholm Creek Park land was acquired in 1971 through 1995 for a total of 281.90 acres. This park features a 1.6 mile nature trail along Chisholm Creek that includes a wetlands area. Land and Water Conservation Funds, provided by the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks and the National Park Service, have been used to develop this park. The park area south of the K-96 bypass has been designated a Wichita Wild Habitat area.

The Great Plains Nature Center is also located within the park and is a cooperative effort between local, state and federal governments to provide an educational opportunity to the public. Amenities include: an open shelter, picnic tables, restroom facilities, seven parking lots, a nature trail, fishing ponds, nine charcoal grills, Wichita Wild Habitat Area, and the K-96 bicycle path that connects to the surrounding neighborhoods as well as the park within the Great Plains Nature Center with 2.15 miles of bicycle trails. There have been no reported incidents that bicycles have disturbed any nature or habitat in this park.

Question 5: But won't bicycles disturb the horses that currently use Pawnee Prairie Park?

Answer: There are many, many State parks in Kansas that allow equestrians to ride. The five State parks closest to Wichita were contacted about this question.

- Kanopolis State Park: 27 plus miles of multi-use trails;
- El Dorado State Park: 20 miles of equestrian only trails;
- Harvey County East Park: 5.5 miles of multi-use trails;
- Harvey County West Park: 5.1 miles of multi-use trails; and
- Sand Hills State Park: 15 miles of multi-use trails

Of the five parks contacted, four of the parks not only allow bicycles, but they incorporate what is known as a multi-use trail (one trail that is for several uses). The multi-use trails allow for hikers, equestrians, and bicycles on one trail. The park rangers were contacted at each of the multi-use trail parks, and the rangers all replied that there have been no reported incidents between bicycles and horses on the shared trails.

Question 6: I thought Pawnee Prairie Park was not going to allow multi-use trails.

Answer: Due to the concerns of the equestrians, the proposed path for bicycling will be kept separate from the horse and hiker paths, and there will be new signage installed along all paths to enforce the separation.

Question 7: But why would you allow bicycles in this park anyway? Don't the bicyclists have enough paths and lanes throughout Wichita?

Answer: There are no dedicated paths for bicycling in this part of Wichita, and yet there are thousands of residents. The Master Bicycle and Pedestrian plan for the City of Wichita has been unable to make connections to this part of Wichita, and by providing paths through this spacious park, nearby residents and others will be able to eventually commute and connect with more trails and paths. New signage will also offer guidance to youth in the area that are wanting to ride bicycles in the park but are currently restricted from doing so. Wichita residents have consistently indicated a desire for bicycle related improvements through input collected from public meetings, community plans, and resident surveys.

Question 8: Why are the trails being taken away from the equestrians?

Answer: No trails are being taken away from equestrians. The concrete path that was installed back in 1994 for hikers became a hindrance to the equestrians and over the years the equestrians have mostly walked beside this particular path. Shortly after park officials installed the path it was decided that no more hard paved trails would be allowed in this particular park. The concrete path will be set aside for bicycling and the equestrians will be allowed to use all of the more forested area on the south side of the concrete path. Also, horses defecate and have created hindrances on this concrete path.

Question 9: Irene Plumlee was an equestrian and wildlife enthusiast that volunteered hundreds of hours in creating equestrian trails throughout this park. What will happen to the current sign that touts the name "Plumlee Trails"?

Answer: Plumlee Trails will still remain the name for the equestrian/hiker trails that are currently being used by park enthusiasts. There are more than eight miles of unpaved equestrian/hiker trails, and there will be approximately two and a half miles of separate bicycle paths; a little less than one mile is the current concrete path. The new installed bicycle paths will be chipped limestone or some other sustainable material.

Question 10: Is it true that endangered species live in this park?

Answer: No. Charles Cope, District Wildlife Biologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism has found no endangered species in Pawnee Prairie Park. Further, when trees are cleared for either disease or undesirability (such as the red cedars), they are carefully checked for any nesting migratory birds or other protected species prior to being removed.

Question 11: How many of the equestrians that come to this park live in Wichita?

Answer: We are unsure of this answer. There are currently around 50 registered Wichita residents who have a horse(s) within the city limits.